



Empowering Women in the 21st Century: Paving the Way with Broadband and Mobility

A Joint Policy Paper From

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF BLACK ELECTED LEGISLATIVE WOMEN
NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN LEGISLATORS



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Enabling New Opportunities With Empowering Technology

Today, at the dawn of the digital age, women are pursuing their dreams without limits on their vision of achievement. They are executives, entrepreneurs, mothers, lawyers, doctors, caregivers, teachers, heads of households, political leaders, community activists, educators, technicians, laborers, lawmakers, soldiers and anything else their hearts desire.

As the career and life opportunities for women have expanded, so too, have the challenges they face and the responsibilities they bear. More than ever before, women work outside the home. On average, however, women still earn less money than men; yet, they still shoulder the primary responsibilities for taking care of children, tending to aging parents, arranging for health care, managing households, and connecting with teachers and schools. These responsibilities can be particularly challenging for women of color and those on low and fixed incomes. The weight of family management falls most heavily on the growing number of single moms, who usually must survive on limited resources or without sufficient family support to help ease their load.

In the face of these and other challenges, women have gained a powerful new ally in advanced communication technologies. Broadband Internet can connect women to a stunning array of resources. With a high-speed broadband-enabled Internet connection, women can more readily reach out to wide networks of friends and family for support and counsel at any time of the day or night. Women can access critical information and resources to find jobs, obtain training address health issues, help aging parents, and make decisions about finances – and they can do so quickly, efficiently, and with the benefit of easily accessible information. By using online resources, women can run their businesses more efficiently, boost profitability and enhance customer service, all while staying connected to and supporting the needs of their families. Increasingly, the universal mobility of Internet access – created by the expansion of wireless networks and capabilities – has enabled women on the go to use laptops or smart phones to better manage their responsibilities at both work and home. The result is greater connectivity, efficiency and satisfaction with the ways we live, work and play.

After initially lagging behind men in adapting to the online world, the majority of women in America have enthusiastically embraced the Internet. According to a study conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, in 2006, 45% of men had adopted broadband Internet, compared to 38% of women.¹ By spring 2009, this gender gap had closed completely, with 63% of women reporting that they had access to a broadband Internet connection at home, compared to 64% of men.² Millions more women connect to the Internet from work, or with slower dial-up connections that used the family phone line.

Despite this progress, however, millions of women, especially those with lower incomes or living in unserved areas, remain unconnected to the Internet's economic, medical, social, educational and other life enhancing opportunities and benefits. While the reasons may vary, and include everything from lack of interest to a lack of money, more than one-third of American women do not have a broadband connection at home.³ What's more, many of these women may

¹ Pew Internet & American Life Project, Home Broadband Adoption 2009, June 2009 available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/10-Home-Broadband-Adoption-2009.aspx> (last visited October 26, 2009)

² Id.

³ Id.

not be using the Internet in any form, whether broadband or dial-up, or from any location at all. People of color, too, tend to be less connected than their fellow citizens.⁴

If women do not take full advantage of digital technology, they cannot be fully engaged in America's economic, political and social affairs. In a digital society, only those who are online truly enjoy the first class citizenship women have sought since before the birth of the Republic.

As elected officials, we are keenly attuned to the need to change the ways we think about technology. We recognize the importance of re-educating our constituents and ourselves about the profound opportunities available to us through increased broadband adoption and use. With women legislators being an average of seven years older than our male counterparts, we also recognize this as an opportunity to leverage our experience, expertise, and collective wisdom to better serve our country. The time is now to increase our efforts at empowering communities by empowering women. Broadband can help us pave the way towards that goal; and it is a goal we must all work towards together. We must remain steadfast on our quest to achieve universal broadband access, adoption and use, and we cannot afford to lose sight of our shared vision of a better broadband future for us all.

That is why, on behalf of digitally unconnected women nation-wide, the National Foundation for Women Legislators (NFWL) and the National Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women (NOBEL/Women) have joined together across political lines to create Internet opportunities by embracing policies that make safe and affordable broadband available to every woman, man and child in America. We believe Internet connectivity, especially broadband service that enables secure, real-time access to telemedicine services, distance learning and high quality videos, is critical for economic opportunity, education, civic engagement, and full participation in contemporary American life.

In the pages that follow, we examine the ways women use broadband, and we map out core principles for national policymakers as they consider our broadband future.

What's at Stake: The Power of Broadband Internet Connectivity

Broadband – the always-on high-speed connection to the Internet – is important because of how it improves the quality of life for every American. It is a great enabler that can help women carry out their responsibilities at work and at home, and also help our country reach its national goals. Economic opportunity and jobs, better health care, education for the twenty-first century, sustainability and energy independence, investment and innovation that improve lives, public safety, and civic empowerment can all be advanced by harnessing the power of broadband.

Work and Entrepreneurship. Broadband creates new flexibility for single mothers and married women who are taking care of children or parents while juggling the rigorous demands of a work environment. With broadband, women can explore new job opportunities that are increasingly posted online and, often, only online. A broadband connection also makes it possible to explore new avenues of entrepreneurship, and to work from home at a growing number of jobs or for “virtual companies” that no longer require a trip to the office. For those without a broadband connection, these opportunities simply don't exist. The State of Hawaii,

⁴ Pew, Home Broadband Adoption 2009, June 2009 supra.

for example, recently found that 60 percent of jobseekers couldn't take advantage of its online job network because they either lacked Internet access or sufficient computer skills to properly take part in the job application process.⁵ For those already employed, knowledge of the Internet and how to use it enables them to improve their skills and qualifications for the growing number of jobs that require spending time online. According to the University of Southern California's Center for the Digital Future, the use of the Internet at work averaged one full day of work each week in 2006.⁶ Indeed, broadband can be a powerful agent of change that can help close the gaps in education, economic prospects, and aspirations that threaten to leave too many of our citizens permanently behind.

Education and Healthcare. With high-speed Internet, women can keep in touch with their children's schools and advance their own education by enrolling in online courses and degree programs at distant colleges and universities. They can find critical information about health conditions, health care, and insurance options. And more and more, they can take advantage of telemedicine and e-health opportunities, including using high-speed Internet for consultations with doctors and joining monitoring programs for patients with chronic disease. Wireless broadband also provides new ways to check on aging parents so that they can remain in their own homes safely instead of requiring institutional care. By connecting Americans with geographically distant specialists via wireless broadband or other connections, telemedicine can improve the quality of care Americans can expect to receive, and also cut costs by providing services that might otherwise require long distance travel or admission to a health care facility. A new report from the Brookings Institution summarizes some of the benefits of broadband use in the healthcare arena, observing:

People monitor their own weight, blood pressure, pulse, and sugar levels, and send test results via remote devices to health care providers. Patients store their medical records online and have access regardless of where they are in the United States or around the world. They get personalized feedback via e-mail and reminders when they gain weight, have an uptick on their cholesterol levels, don't take their medicine, or have high blood pressure. Social networking sites provide discussion forums and the benefit of collective experience from other people suffering similar problems.⁷

Family Connectedness. Broadband can be a unifying force, connecting women more closely to family, friends and community. Far more than men, women are delighted by the Internet's social power, and they account for about sixty percent of users of the most popular social networking sites.⁸ Even before Facebook, MySpace and other social networks became popular, nearly half

⁵ "Lack of Computer Skills Foils Many Job-Seekers," MSNBC, October 2, 2009, available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/33106445> (last visited October 23, 2009).

⁶ Center of the Digital Future, Web Insight 15, December 3, 2007, available at http://www.digitalcenter.org/pages/Archive_content.asp?intGlobalId=18&intTypeId=1 (last visited October 23, 2009).

⁷ West, Darrell M., "Customer Driven Medicine: How to Create a New Health-Care System," October 2009 available at http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2009/1008_mhealth_west/1008_mhealth_west.pdf (last visited October 23, 2009).

⁸ "Women Outnumber Men on Social Network Sites," *Wall Street Journal*, October 2009 available at <http://blogs.wsj.com/digits/2009/10/07/women-outnumber-men-on-social-networking-sites/> (last visited October 23, 2009).

of women surveyed said e-mail enabled them to improve their relationships with family and friends, according to a 2005 survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project.⁹

Civic and Political Engagement. The Internet can deliver political empowerment, especially for women, minorities, the poor, and others who have struggled to have their voices heard. With broadband, political leaders, candidates, and voters can conduct two-way conversations, share information about key issues, and organize their supporters. Handheld devices and other mobile communications enhance the power of broadband by enabling poll watchers and campaign organizers to keep in constant touch in real-time, as circumstances require.

Indeed, broadband can be an agent of inclusiveness that can help knit America into a single on-line community so that all can take part equally in a comprehensive and interactive national dialogue. A broadband-enabled Internet can facilitate an ongoing national conversation about our dreams and aspirations without regard to gender, age, race, ethnicity, wealth or geographic location. Just as broadband removes the barriers of distance to enable commercial transactions from across the globe, broadband also removes the barriers of physical distance, psychology and culture that have divided city from farm, rural hamlet from inner city neighborhood, and suburbia from trailer park. To fulfill this vision, all Americans must have the opportunity to adopt and use safe and affordable broadband service.

A Policy Framework for Empowering Women Through Broadband

Delivering broadband to every American is key to maintaining U.S. economic leadership and competitiveness in the twenty-first century. Further, broadband technologies will enable women to continue their own leadership roles at home and at work while maintaining a healthy balance with their family and social obligations. The goal of ubiquitous broadband access and adoption is widely shared, but the road map for getting there is not entirely clear. We, therefore, strongly endorse the Congressional request for a comprehensive National Broadband Plan to be produced by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

In producing its National Broadband Plan, the FCC has asked for input from interested parties and, in that spirit, NFWL and NOBEL/Women have developed a set of core principles that we are sharing today. These principles reflect our own experiences as legislators and Internet users, input from our constituents, and the needs of our communities. Our thinking is guided by some fundamental realities:

1. **Connectedness is the Highest Priority.** Our first goal is to ensure that the unserved have at least basic broadband connectivity, that they have computing technology with which to access the Internet, and that every citizen is afforded access to and the opportunity to adopt broadband. We also seek to improve services for the underserved and, in the long run, make America's networks the most innovative and technologically sophisticated in the world. But first the task is to connect every citizen – by deploying infrastructure where it is now lacking and by encouraging all citizens to sign up for service and adopt broadband once it is available. Connectivity to all as the first goal is

⁹ Pew Internet & American Life Project, "How Women and Men Use the Internet," December 28, 2005 available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2005How-Women-and-Men-Use-the-Internet.aspx> (last visited October 26, 2009)

not only the right thing; it's also the most cost efficient goal in the short term. The FCC estimates that connecting every American to the highest speed broadband would cost about \$350 billion, while ensuring basic broadband connectivity for all would cost about \$20 billion.¹⁰

Assuring universal broadband connectivity will take time, and it is a task that requires the collaborative efforts of government and private enterprise. The federal government has solidified its support of this goal by allocating \$7.2 billion for broadband programs in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. This was an essential first step towards universal broadband connectivity, but the government alone cannot be responsible for ensuring that every American is connected to broadband. Private enterprise, which contributes \$70 billion annually to deploy broadband across the country, can further guarantee the successful achievement of universal connectivity through its continued investments in broadband infrastructure and online services.

As state and local legislators who balance budgets every year, we believe America must make sure it gets the right value for its dollars, especially at a time when the recession has imposed new budgetary constraints. As we consider the costs of universal connectivity, we must likewise carefully consider the costs to our national productivity and prosperity should we fail to timely deploy broadband to *all* Americans. Broadband connectivity will provide all with a greater opportunity to improve their socio-economic well-being and thereby relieve pressure on federal, state and local social service and entitlement programs.

2. **Incentives for Broadband Adoption.** We recognize the importance of developing innovative messaging mechanisms and providing opportunities to use online services in order to encourage broadband adoption by the one-third of Americans who aren't connected or using broadband, even though service is available where they live. While unacceptable gaps in broadband infrastructure must be addressed, the FCC estimates that roughly 95% of Americans live in places where some form of broadband is available.¹¹ Despite the availability of broadband, the number of Americans who have adopted broadband has not kept pace with the number who could. Some non-users say they do not see the value of connectivity; others say they lack the skills; and still others simply can't afford it or do not even own computers with which to go online and navigate the Internet.

As policymakers, there are many things we can do to encourage our communities to use broadband, starting with moving government services online, making such services accessible on mobile devices and making them easier to use. We can also find ways to incent the use of online services by making them more affordable and available directly to the person, wherever she may be. Just as we have a responsibility for connecting all Americans to their broadband future, we have the attendant responsibility to ensure that all people who have access to broadband have the opportunity to use online services to enhance their lives. Bringing these Americans into the digital age is essential if we hope

¹⁰ FCC Status Report on National Broadband Plan, September 29, 2009, available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-293742A1.pdf (last visited October 23, 2009).

¹¹ Id.

to increase our national sense of community, and restore our country's continued prosperity and global competitiveness.

Closing the gaps in broadband adoption will require a range of programs, such as digital literacy training to address knowledge deficiencies, and subsidies or other support mechanisms to address the barriers to broadband entry created by lack of financial resources. We must also be mindful of opportunities to create content that is both user-friendly and relevant to the communities we serve so that people are motivated to participate in the online world.

3. **Affordability.** We believe that affordability is crucial to achieving universal broadband access and adoption, especially for those with lower incomes – the largest group of Americans who are not connected to the Internet. Because women tend to earn less than men, affordability is especially important to increasing broadband adoption and use amongst the 35 million women who are heads of households or raising children on their own.¹²

With those fundamental priorities as our guide, we offer the following core principles for *Effective Broadband* that will serve women, men and children alike across America. As we will explore below, *Effective Broadband* must be:

- *Inclusive*
- *Affordable*
- *Mobile*
- *Safe*
- *Innovative and Dynamic*

Inclusive Broadband

Drawing every American into the broadband world must be the first element of our national strategy. In every city, every town and every hamlet, we must ensure that every woman, man, and child can enjoy the enrichment and opportunities made possible by broadband connectivity, and access to computing devices, with a range of technologies that subscribers believe best meet their needs. If we succeed, we will bring America closer to our historic vision of equal opportunity.

We must eliminate the digital divide between those with Internet connectivity and those without. Rich or poor, urban or rural, young or old, white or a person of color, male or female, college-educated or not – all are entitled to participate in our digital society. But right now, poorer Americans, rural Americans, older Americans, and minority Americans are less likely to be online. There are two parts to the connectivity equation: access to broadband and access to computing technology.

If we succeed in providing people with an on-ramp to the Internet that includes access to affordable computing devices, then broadband can help bridge the gaps we currently see between

¹²“America’s Families and Living Arrangements: 2008,” U.S. Census Bureau, February 2009, available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2008.html> (last visited October 23, 2009).

various segments of society by providing new access to economic opportunity, education, health care and the other bounties that America offers. But, if we fail, broadband will become just one more dividing line and will further expand the distance that already separates Americans across socio-economic lines.

Closing the gaps will require a range of creative strategies to teach computer skills to those who don't have them, to demonstrate the value of connectivity to those who doubt it, and to overcome the economic barriers that deter the less affluent from buying broadband service. We therefore set forth the following policy recommendations:

- *For those who lack skills, we must devise digital literacy programs and technical training initiatives that will help them overcome their anxiety about technology.* We can enlist volunteers, especially students, in local communities to share their knowledge. Community service organizations – ranging from Girl Scouts to City Year and Teach for America – can provide resources. Libraries, schools and other public spaces can be transformed into community computing centers that provide training. Beyond a training ground, these spaces can also be used as technology hubs for those who do not have broadband or computer access at home to take their first steps into the online world.
- *For those who say the Internet lacks relevance to them, we must work harder to boost its value in their eyes.* A focus on e-government to provide essential services and enable citizens to engage more effectively with public officials can stimulate adoption by providing tangible reasons to go online. When more citizens can work from home by using broadband, “visit” the doctor via their online connection, attend a classroom lecture at a time or place of their choice, download a movie, watch a sporting event, go shopping, or see family pictures from the other side of the country, broadband gains in value. This enhanced value will give more Americans a reason to connect.
- *We also must identify ways to deliver broadband to lower-income Americans who cannot afford it at any price.* We do not endorse any particular approach, but believe a variety of options are worth exploring, including non-profit efforts that recycle computers and train recipients on how to use them, public-private partnerships that provide low-cost equipment and subsidies, government programs that support computer purchases and broadband subscriptions and the required provision of Internet access in new housing projects.

Affordable Broadband

If we want more women to sign up for broadband service, we must make sure it is affordable. No matter how much a consumer may want it or how useful it is, if broadband costs too much some will be forced to go without. Affordability, of course, is a relative term whose definition varies from consumer to consumer and budget to budget. But when it comes to broadband, we know for certain that the less money a family has, the less likely it will be able to pay for Internet service.

The data is instructive. Among Americans earning less than \$20,000 a year, just 35% subscribed to broadband at home in spring 2009. Among those earning \$20,000 to \$40,000, the adoption

rate was nearly 54%; and almost nine of ten Americans earning \$100,000 or more subscribed to broadband at home.¹³

Notably, the Pew Internet & American Life Project reports that, in the aggregate, issues of relevance are more important than price in explaining why non-adopters do not have broadband. But the importance of price becomes increasingly more salient as income declines. Two-thirds of those who point to price as the main deterrent to adoption earn \$40,000 or less each year.¹⁴ Similarly, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies reports that two-thirds of African-American non-Internet users said price is a major concern. More than half of this group said they would adopt broadband if the price came down.¹⁵ Price is also more important to women than to men, according to Pew, with women accounting for 56% of those who say high prices keep them from adopting broadband.¹⁶

A recent study by economists Robert J. Shapiro and Kevin A. Hassett found that policies that yield higher prices for lower income Americans would delay universal broadband adoption by several years. The study found that broadband connectivity among those earning less than \$30,000 a year will be as much as 20 percentage points lower in 2016 in the higher price scenario than under flexible pricing that makes service more affordable.¹⁷ Ever mindful of the impact that price and affordability have on broadband adoption and use:

- *We must guard against actions that increase the cost of expanding broadband networks and, therefore, drive consumer prices higher.* This means we must encourage pricing flexibility so that consumers have an array of pricing and service options from which to select and that fit a range of personal budgets. These options must include both wireless and wired broadband service modes.
- *We must likewise ensure that consumers can reap the benefits of a competitive marketplace in which the costs of broadband services are regulated primarily by consumer demand.* Just as broadband is a great equalizer amongst people it must likewise serve the same democratizing purpose amongst network and application providers alike. The ability to choose among broadband services and the types of services that best suit a person's intended use for the Internet is essential to increasing both the affordability and value of broadband for American consumers.

Mobile Broadband

Increasingly, broadband is about mobility. Wireless service, using laptops, net books and a variety of handheld devices are enabling Americans to enjoy broadband service almost anywhere they go. Indeed, for many Americans remote access to broadband via a wireless device has

¹³ Pew, Home Broadband Adoption 2009, June 2009 *supra*.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, "Broadband Imperatives for African Americans," 2009 http://www.jointcenter.org/publications_recent_publications/media_and_technology/broadband_imperatives_for_african_americans (last visited October 26, 2009)

¹⁶ Pew Home Broadband Adoption 2009, June 2009, *supra*.

¹⁷ Hassett, Kevin A. and Shapiro, Robert J., "Towards Universal Broadband: Flexible Broadband Pricing and the Digital Divide," August 2009 available at http://www.gcbpp.org/files/Academic_Papers/AP_Hassett_Shapiro_Towards.pdf (last visited October 26, 2009)

become virtually indispensable. For example, a survey by Women Impacting Public Policy finds that 70 percent of female business owners take both their laptop and their handheld wireless device when they go on a business trip, and almost 40 percent say that there is no amount of money large enough to get them to give up their handheld device.¹⁸ According to the “Women and Digital Life” study, girls and young women (ages 12-24) spend twice as much time (2.8 hours/day average) on their wireless devices compared to women over age 40 (1.2 hours/day average).¹⁹ Girls and young women also rated their wireless device as the technology having the greatest impact on their daily lives in the past two years.²⁰

Wireless networks offer some inherent advantages as we seek to bring more people online. In certain instances, deployment of wireless service can be less costly than wired infrastructure; thus, wireless can bring broadband to communities where wired service is too costly to build. Moreover, wireless networks can provide a gateway to broadband for those who cannot afford a computer or simply move around too much to commit to broadband through a desktop computer and wired connection. For example, one quarter of the African-Americans who lack fixed broadband have accessed the Internet with a cell phone or smart phone.

Almost 90 percent²¹ of Americans already own a cell phone, so moving to wireless broadband on a smart phone will be a logical next step for many. Hispanic Americans and African Americans are embracing mobile wireless more enthusiastically than their White counterparts, and growth in wireless Internet usage was twice as fast among African Americans as it was for whites from the end of 2007 to the beginning of 2009. In fact, combining wireless broadband with wired broadband narrows the digital divide among the races. The Pew Internet & American Life Project observes: “[t]o an extent notably greater than that for whites, wireless access for African Americans serves as a substitute for a missing on ramp to the Internet – the home broadband connection.”²²

The trend toward wireless carries important implications for broadband policy. Metrics that assess the success of our broadband policies must include analysis of mobile broadband deployment.

Safe Broadband

Accessing the Internet must be safe. Users need reasonable confidence that they can search the Internet for information, make online purchases, participate in social networks, take advantage of online banking, apply for jobs, and perform all the other online tasks they choose and also leave the Internet without a computer virus or a stolen identity. Just as we all want to feel safe when we walk to the store, we need a sense of security when we visit the Internet.

¹⁸ Women Impacting Public Policy Telecommunications Policy Corner, “Resource Corner Recent National MW Survey,” available at <http://www.wipp.org/?page=Telecommunications> (last visited October 22, 2009).

¹⁹ See “Women and Digital Life,” Solutions Research Group. May 2009, available at <http://www.srgnet.com/us/?p=361> (last visited October 14, 2009).

²⁰ See id.

²¹ Cellular Telephone Industry Association, “Wireless Quick Facts, available at <http://ctia.org/advocacy/research/index.cfm/AID/10323> (last visited October 26, 2009)

²² Pew Internet & American Life Project, “Wireless Internet Use,” July 2009 available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/12-Wireless-Internet-Use.aspx> (last visited October 26, 2009)

While some strides have been made to assuring greater consumer safety online, experience indicates that we have much work left to do. In a recent survey by *Consumer Reports*, one in five respondents said they had encountered unwelcome online activity in the past two years.²³ For instance, two million households reported identity theft connected with online activity, and millions more consumers reported problems with spyware, viruses, and “phishing” scams aimed at collecting their personal information.²⁴

Just as crime and fear of crime drives people out of neighborhoods and contributes to urban blight in the physical world, online crime can deter Internet usage, discourage broadband adoption, and erode the experience of those who continue to go online. According to the Center for the Digital Future, three-fourths of Americans who do not go online say they are very concerned about privacy online.²⁵

To achieve our national broadband goals and reap the full benefits of the Internet, we need to support a national initiative to keep the Internet safe. Therefore, NFWL and NOBEL/Women recommend that:

- *Joint efforts should be taken by government, consumers and the private sector alike to assure online safety for all participants who choose to take part in online activity.* Government and the private sector companies who manage the networks and run web sites should pool their efforts against online crime, using law enforcement techniques, network management tools, and crime-fighting technologies to enhance safety. Consumers, too, must play a role by learning how to protect their private information, spot scams and minimize risks.

Innovative and Dynamic Broadband

Above all else, the Internet must remain innovative and dynamic. The Internet’s remarkable journey from the province of academics and technologists to the world’s largest mass communications medium took place because it fulfills so many human needs, and it does so in a real-time and dynamic way. It helps us connect on a social level, exchange information, take better care of ourselves and our families, do our work better, expand our businesses, and enjoy our leisure more.

With broadband connectivity, we can educate and entertain ourselves, enhance economic pursuits, engage in new levels of civic and social discourse, shop, compare prices for a range of goods, enjoy movies and music, participate in a classroom, consult our doctor, and visit great libraries wherever we live, work or play. And with the continuing development of wireless technology, we can increasingly enjoy these same conveniences from anyplace we happen to be.

²³ “Boom Time for Cybercrime,” *Consumer Reports*, June 2009, available at <http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/magazine-archive/june-2009/electronics-computers/state-of-the-net/overview/state-of-the-net-ov.htm> (last visited October 23, 2009).

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ “2009 Digital Future Project,” annual survey, The Center for the Digital Future, University of Southern California’s, Annenberg School for Communication, April 2009 available at http://www.digitalcenter.org/pages/current_report.asp?intGlobalId=43 (October 26, 2009)

The real genius of the Internet is the continued innovation in response to consumers' changing needs. Powered by broadband connectivity, the Internet's capabilities have expanded greatly as entrepreneurs and engineers have combined their talents to create a range of new applications and services.

Broadband itself is dynamic, coming in many flavors and providing a range of capabilities that can be matched to the users' individual needs. Driven by individual ingenuity, we enjoy an astounding diversity of broadband-based services – from smart electric grids to streaming videos that we could barely imagine just a few years ago. To ensure that activity on the Internet continues to thrive, and that all Americans can reap the benefits of this dynamic medium, NFWL and NOBEL/Women recommend that:

- *As a nation, we must foster this dynamism with policies that promote continued investment and creativity as the private sector responds to consumers' widely varying desires.* In that way, the Internet will remain filled with both mass market goods and niche services to reach specific groups and address specific challenges. As content and capabilities expand, so will the number of Americans who decide that broadband Internet should be part of their life. And, because it is so hard to foresee what direction ingenuity leads us, we must guard against policies that inadvertently subvert creativity by presuming to know what the online future will look like.

For Women, for All Americans, Broadband is the Prize

Women gravitate toward broadband because it can help us seize opportunities, make up for past inequities, and address the special challenges we face. But even as broadband holds huge promise for women, it is above all an opportunity for America.

Closing our digital divides can help us bridge America's most intractable divides. With inclusive broadband that delivers high-speed Internet to every citizen we can move closer to our longstanding national goal of equal opportunity and global prosperity. With inclusive broadband, we can deliver better health care, quality education, more efficient workplaces, and a cleaner environment and a stronger democracy.

This quest is so important that NFWL and NOBEL/Women have reached across party lines to identify core principles, suggest key questions for national policymakers, and advocate for affordable and safe broadband that continues to evolve to meet consumer needs. Our vision is deliberately inclusive. It also recognizes the growing potential of mobile broadband to act as a gateway to the Internet for those who do not have access to the wired Internet and to match modern technology with Americans' historic preference for mobility.

We must all proceed with humility in the recognition that we do not know where technology will lead us, and we encourage guarding against policies that may unintentionally block innovations that we cannot predict or widen our digital divides in ways we cannot foresee.

In that spirit, we urge national policymakers and all of our fellow citizens to put aside ideological disagreements and identify the best fact-based policies to advance broadband access, adoption affordability and use.